

SPEEDBOATS FOR VICTORY

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SUMMARY

This paper shows how from Gar Wood's sporting interest in motor boat racing sprung a major weapon of this war.

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INTRODUCTION

In the present war - World War II - the PT boats are playing a large part. In the Pacific, in the Battle of Bataan, the PT boat has inspired many stories. If we look back to their origin, there appears in the foreground the name of Garfield A. Wood, better known to the sporting world as Gar Wood.

WOOD'S START IN BOAT RACING

According to J.L.Barrett,¹ Gar Wood has "done more to popularize motor-boating than any other man." His career started when he bought an outmoded Gold Cup winner, the Miss Detroit. He remodded this boat and installed a Curtis "12" motor. The maximum speed of the boat would depend on the horsepower per pound of engine. Since airplane motors were built for maximum horsepower per pound of engine, Wood decided that those were the motors that he wanted for his racing boats.

THE MISS AMERICAS

After the first World War Wood was able to buy the Liberty "12" motor. In 1920 he went to England with his Miss America I, the first of his boats to be powered by a Liberty motor. When he came back to the United States he brought with him the Harmsworth Trophy, which has remained here since then. He continued using the Liberty motor in his next four Miss Americas.

1. Barrett, J. Lee, Speed Boat Kings, 1939

Miss America VI was powered by new air-cooled marine motors, but never did run in a trophy race, for in a trial run a few days before the race, it blew up. The motors were fished up and installed in Miss America VII just in time for the race, which she entered and won.

In 1931 Wood entered two boats against the British challenger. They were Miss America VIII and Miss America IX. The first heat of the race was won by the British. In the second heat the British boat capsized on the turn. Miss America IX, being piloted by Gar Wood was disqualified for beating the gun. It crossed the starting line seven, instead of five, seconds before the gun. This left Miss America VIII to finish the course and enabled us to hold the trophy.

MOTHER OF THE PT BOAT

As a result of this race the British became more determined to win and again challenged in 1932. Wood needed more horsepower in his boat this time. By installing four 750 Packard engines in one boat he still did not have the power he desired. After supercharging the engines, increasing their compression ratio, and by other means used to increase power, he managed to squeeze 1900 horsepower out of each of the four engines.

In the Harmsworth Trophy races the limit on the length of the boat is 40 feet. Wood had the problem of installing a total of 7600 horsepower in a hull of 38 feet. A special gear box had to be developed to harness all this power. Not a cubic inch of hull could be wasted. Miss America X lived up to her expectations. The Trophy was again kept by Wood. A new world

record of 124.915 miles per hour was set. This boat was the mother of the PT.

Wood tried talking the Navy into building a number of these boats before the present war, but was unsuccessful. However, even with this late start, the PT boat has proved very effective.

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